

Anthony F. SHAKER¹: *Reintroducing Philosophy: Thinking as the Gathering of Civilization According to Contemporary, Islamicate and Ancient Sources*

*Reviewed by Nevad KAHTERAN**

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A number of the scholars mentioned in the acknowledgments of this work and whom I know personally—including Jana S. Rošker, Ady Van den Stock and, especially, Sachiko Murata—have urged me to read and review this stimulating book by Anthony F. Shaker. A philosopher, a scholar of Islamic thought/civilization, and an analyst of social theory, he has translated three important books by Ghazālī and composed works on both Islamic and Western European philosophy, and on contemporary political developments. These include *Thinking in the Language of Reality* (2012), an exposition of the systematic philosophy of Šadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 1274). As far as this reviewer is concerned, the thematic scope of this new book is itself testimony that “new thresholds are possible for our troubled humanity”. Vernon Press ought to be congratulated for publishing this extraordinarily rich book, which I highly recommend.

In this study of philosophy, the author asks the reader to keep a question in mind concerning the dissolution of “Western” hegemony and the possibility of a return to more natural course of history for humanity’s inheritance and civilization. Contrary to the prevailing manner of portraying Islam and Muslims in negative stereotypes (see especially Morris, Shepard, and Tidswell, 2019), Shaker sees in Islam “the advent of the first truly global (Islamicate civilization)”, and takes into account that we are now entering a post-Western world. His expertise is grounded

1 Anthony F. SHAKER, PhD, Former Visiting Scholar, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University (<https://independent.academia.edu/AnthonyShaker>).
Email address: afshaker@aol.com

* Nevad KAHTERAN, Professor of Eastern and Comparative Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo.
Email address: nevad.kahteran@ff.unsa.ba



in Islamicate, German and Greek philosophy. In certain respects, it is a continuation of his previously published book *Modernity, Civilization and the Return to History* (2017), with the same publisher. It analyses themes from several world traditions in logic, knowledge and metaphysics connected with the quest for completeness of thinking, and it adopts a radically interdisciplinary approach in which all translations from Arabic, German, French and Greek are the author's own.

At this late hour of our collective history, Shaker is able to link the German philosophical tradition—e.g. Hegel's master ideas and philosophical system, Nietzsche, Heidegger and other giants of German philosophy—to the Islamic one of Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Qūnawī, Sadrā and others. *Reintroducing Philosophy* is based on a concentrated reading of all these sources.

Of course, the author does not say that every path merits examination in his book. Especially given the change in intellectual perspective referred to in the "Introduction", it is worth mentioning here another book with respect to the possible links between the German tradition and Islamic philosophy written by Ian Almond, *History of Islam in German Thought: From Leibniz to Nietzsche* (2010). I would also add Moser, Gösken, and Hayes' book *Heidegger in the Islamicate World* (2019), which contributes to the scholarship and understanding of Heidegger's philosophy in relation to Islamic thought, without being conditioned by particular religious concerns or prejudices. In fact, this is the very reason why the author chose to use the word "Islamicate" instead of "Islamic" in the book's subtitle. What is the appropriate stance to adopt? As in the above mentioned book, Shaker applied a term invented by world historian Marshall Hodgson, author of *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, where it is defined as follows:

Islamicate would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims. (Hodgson 1974, vol. I: 58–59)

For Shaker, "the present book will show that the incompleteness of thought came to be understood not as an incompleteness of omission (e.g., in a formal proof), as it is today, but an incompleteness of purpose". His selection of themes incorporated in the book is lengthened by the need to cut across cultural and historical boundaries. The lack of Africa and the gaps on India and China are compensated for with the tradition of *Hikma* (an Arabic term which literally means wisdom, and the usual connotation is the knowledge of first principles, that is, of God, where the bedrock of the thought-system being the Qur'an and the *hadith*),

ancient Greek and German traditions for the Western-centric narrative, or a self-adoring “Western”-centric worldview that has dampened debate for too long. Frankly speaking, the multifaceted and multi-layered approach adopted in the book is astonishing.

Quite understandable is the fact that this study is oriented toward the interconnectivity of ideas across cultural and temporal boundaries, as well as the ends to which they were originally formulated or applied, simultaneously running into parallels, borrowings and affinities across cultural boundaries through his systematic attack on Eurocentrism. However, Shaker is quite aware that every critique of Westernism and Eurocentrism frankly seems to fall on deaf ears in the absence of a more accurate measurement, i.e. there is a need for people to understand the influence of non-European traditions on European thought, of other and earlier traditions’ true role in “this late gathering of civilization”, as he portrays it there.

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Part one and the first chapter begin by asking with what sort of *things*, in the unfolding of knowing and being, philosophy was concerned with besides “beingness”, its formal subject-matter. In the second chapter Shaker approaches the question of thingness from the perspective of Islamicate philosophy (Sadrā and Qūnawī), with a short discussion of how Heidegger and Kant interpreted the history of thingness as a concept.

Chapter three is dedicated to “the human dimensions of things”, analysing the attitudes of classical Muslim thinkers like al-Farābī, Ibn Sīnā, Qūnawī, Mulla Sadrā and others. As Shaker observes, their contemporary “Western” counterparts have uprooted everything in their path, because they consider what we call “things human” mere instruments in the hands of their authors.

Chapter four is about method and the path to discovery, and takes into account the fact that method by itself does not carry out to its own wider social or metaphysical implications, as stressed here according to the pattern of noetic movement in any kind of “search”. Based on this epistemological model, Shaker presents Qūnawī’s concept or framework of the sign, the philosophical underpinnings of Qūnawī’s logic of signs.

The new logic of discovery is the theme of chapter five, which discusses the prejudices of objective thinking, science and Kant’s “Copernican revolution”, the prejudices of thinking, relationality, multiplicity and presence, presence and identity,

togetherness and nonexistence, along with a note on the paradigm of thinking and its purpose.

Chapter six is about identity, and looks at what is real and what is true (objective truth). It also sets out to correct “tradition”, offering a short review of the standards of scholarship that allow these historical relationships to be systematically overruled for the sake of a local, “Western” narrative, the unification of knower, known and knowledge, or in other words this is how medieval Islamicate philosophy reconciled the onenesses, multiplicities and all other complexities at the root. Is all thinking relational due to the multiplicity imposed by its relationality, and what impact does this have on the very possibility of grasping the reality of anything? The reason for this question is the fact that Muslim philosophers worked out the paradigm of knowing and being, and their focus has always been a question of both *truth* and *reality*, as Shaker notes.

Chapter seven is dedicated to the love of wisdom and the question of science, and here Shaker uses the Qur’anic word *hikma* (Q, II: 269) for love of wisdom, not *falsafa*, which refers to philosophical thinking as derived from classical Greek schools of thought. The dilemma about the hermeneutic as imperative is discussed here, from the apophantic as-proposition to mathematics.

The theme of chapter eight, the mathematization of knowledge, takes into account the longstanding Islamicate interest in mathematics. The chapter starts with Leibniz and goes on to analytic philosophy, Gottlob Frege’s formal system of sign notation, and Heidegger’s critical appraisal of the mathematization of knowledge in modern times.

Part two is dedicated to the dynamics of being.

Chapter 9 is entitled “When is ‘before’ the World?” This has to do with the “cause” of the world’s origin, including with regard to the language of love. We can read in this chapter sections on the world’s beginning as a problem of knowing and being at the “logico-epistemological” level; being and the completeness of thinking, which have to do with the unfolding of being and knowing; empirical negation in the path of knowing; permanence and relationality; moving from thinking to personification; perception and paradigm; and man in the “cosmology” of Timaeus.

Chapter 10 is about creation as allegory, in particular Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī’s (Lat. Rhazes) allegory, philosophy and medicine. (Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā and some other Muslim philosophers were doctors). It also takes into account philosophy’s close association with medicine, in addition to the fact that medical problems helped philosophers uncover new areas of interest in the inquiry into being that perhaps no other positive science could. This chapter also

presents a physiological explanation of philosophy and explanation of the soul and its created beginning.

Chapter eleven, “Philosophy and the Uses of Anatomical Teleology”, deals with the question of how certain technical refinements in physiology, an “art” entirely devoted to the human body, its functions, and the faculties of its soul, sharpened the medieval concept of “purpose”, including in terms of governance and other-worldly felicity.

Chapter twelve, “Explanation in the Greek Spirit”, covers philosophical monism and medical explanation; Aristotle and Sadrā; the problem of one or many principles in the explanation of things; rational versus empirical explanation in the Hippocratic tradition; caution according Galen; shifting medical models in the transformation of science; and the philosophical consequences of the scientific approach.

Chapter thirteen, “Knowledge and Action”, deals with the only conceivable, current ethico-scientific commitment, i.e. the development of still more technologies, with sections on the paradigmatic why-question; under what conditions is philosophy “productive”?; between action and theory; intentional act or actionability?

Chapter fourteen, “The Paradigm of Man in the World”, elaborates the paradigm (Ar. *unmuzaj*) and offers a background for the term. It puts the question of man in perspective, where the paradigm in focus lends itself to the question of “civilization”. It then turns to the philosophical concept of paradigm; the prolegomenon to higher things; selfhood in paradigmatic reason; divine sovereignty and the completeness of particulars.

Chapter fifteen, “The Paradox of Thinking”, discusses al-Fārābī and Sadrā with regard to thinking in the language of man’s being; becoming human; Sadrā on thinking and intellect; paradigm in the argument from perception; the scope of perception; a word on realization (*tahaqquq*). According to Shaker, the paradigm for man’s being in the world may not always have been openly acknowledged, but it pointed clearly to dimensions of a thinking open to being that have meant, since al-Fārābī, nothing less than *the gathering of civilization*, from which stems the subtitle of his book—*thinking as the gathering of civilization*.

Part three, “Philosophy to the East”, compares the ethical turns—the new form of subjectivism—of a good number of intellectual movements around the world.

Chapter sixteen, “Patterns of Philosophical Thinking in Classical India”, shows that many areas of investigation are shared here with the philosophical tradition of the Hellenic and Islamicate worlds. We read here sections on the exegetical imperatives of liberation, because the Vedic tradition constituted an authentic source

of philosophical knowledge; the logic of interpreting being; philosophy as a “way of life”.

Chapter seventeen, “The Restoration of Philosophy in China”, examines the fact is that we are witnessing the *Confucian comeback* in today’s China. Besides the section on logic and the linguistic model in China, a debate on an “ethically” grounded philosophy in China is also included.

Chapter eighteen, “Rebellion against Whom?”, offers sections about method and contents, and the revolutionary interregnum.

Part four, “The Travails of Contemporary Philosophy”, concerns the so-called true method of philosophy and science: inductive reasoning.

Chapter nineteen, “What Is So New about Contemporary Philosophy?”, offers sections on certain alternatives to metaphysics, including Russell and Sellars on knowledge of the world.

Chapter twenty, “How Subservient Is Contemporary Philosophy to Technology?”, offers a short history of the new paradigm and the case of Ottoman Egypt, and a short world history of science: a) the practice of science in the Islamicate period, b) the institutionalization of science; the history of existence.

Chapter twenty one, “The Indifference to Humanity”, offers sections on “being there” before Shaker’s concluding remarks, with thinking as the gathering of civilization advocating structural parallels based on a comparative framework, where modern humanism is not when and how human diversity was discovered. In this epilogue, Shaker is aware that his study accorded *Hikma* a prominent place because of the critical and extended role it played over thought during fourteen centuries of philosophical development, but also because “it was the cauldron of a zone of thinking that set the stage for new level of human civilization”. Although his study is not a history of philosophy, it is in close proximity to world history thanks to a *bibliography which consists of 302 source books*.

At this critical juncture of history, this study should serve as a rude awakening, according to the author, who points to the fact that philosophy has meekly turned itself into an administrative cover for specializations—one recalls Frascati and other lists, as well as webometrics ...—and a moral commitment to little more than gadgets and technology. The author’s respect for the *Hikma* tradition and Islamicate philosophy is expressed once more in the conclusion:

Islamicate philosophy—far older, more complex, more socially and civilizationally ambitious—placed man at the heart of the knowing and being in the single emergence, a divine self-manifestation.

In response, I would like to stress that systematic contemporary philosophy is absent in Arab-Islamic culture, and definitely relegated to the West. It is intellectual tradition that plays, even now, the role of epistemology, ontology and axiology. In the same vein, we may wonder with the late Professor Massimo Campanini whether there are differences between Islamic philosophy and Islamicate philosophy? And if Islamic philosophy represents the space of accepted common knowledge in the Muslim world, then it seems that Islamicate philosophy could become key to opening the door of the unthought (*impensée*) in Islamic lore to enrich, and perhaps strengthen, the thought (*pensée*) that I myself adhere to with both hands, having translated the introductory and concluding chapters of M. Arkoun's book *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (2002).

Here we are in agreement with Campanini's book *Philosophical Perspectives of Modern Qur'anic Exegesis* (2016), in that the Qur'an constitutes the "disclosure" (*kashf*) of the Absolute and Divine Being. It is consequently possible to study the Holy Book philosophically toward a "Philosophical Qur'anology".

Through Islamicate philosophy and the sources used in this book, Shaker hopes for a renewal of Islamic thought, according to the nearly forgotten *Hikma* tradition, at the threshold between the human and the divine realms, in order to realize its higher possibilities and deepest aspirations, thus opening up new horizons that contemporary philosophical thinking has been excluding. It seems to me that Campanini's attitude is consistent with the Islamicate approach presented in this book.

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